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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 71st MEETING

Chairman: Mr. ALOM (Bangladesh)
(Vice-Chairman)

Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. MSELLE

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In the absence of Mr. Sengwe (Zimbabwe), Mr. Alom (Bangladesh), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 116: PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1996-1997 (continued)

Programme budget implications of draft resolution A/51/L.77 concerning agenda item 37 (S/1997/564, A/51/L.77 and Rev.1 and A/C.5/51/54)

1. Mr. MSELLE (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions), orally presenting the Advisory Committee's report on the programme budget implications of draft resolution A/51/L.77, recalled that administrative backstopping had been provided by the United Nations Support Mission in Haiti (UNSMIH) to the International Civilian Mission in Haiti (MICIVIH). In paragraph 2 of its resolution 1086 (1996) of 5 December 1996, the Security Council had decided to extend for the final time the mandate of UNSMIH until 31 July 1997. However, in his report contained in document S/1997/564, the Secretary-General had recommended to the Security Council to continue the United Nations support to the Haitian authorities for the further professionalization of the Haitian National Police and had proposed the establishment of a new mission to be known as the United Nations Transition Mission in Haiti (UNTMIH), with a mandate until 30 November 1997. The estimates for the extension of MICIVIH had been prepared on the assumption that the United Nations peacekeeping presence would continue and that administrative backstopping would therefore continue to be provided to MICIVIH by a United Nations peacekeeping mission in Haiti. The Advisory Committee noted that, should the Security Council not approve the establishment of UNTMIH, it would be necessary to re-examine the administrative requirements of MICIVIH.

2. Following its review of the estimates with representatives of the Secretary-General, who had provided additional information, the Advisory Committee had concluded that some economies were possible, particularly in travel and consultancy costs. It believed that the reasons for requesting six international consultants for 60 days each, at an average fee of $250.00 per day, and six round-trip journeys between New York and Port-au-Prince had not been well explained.

3. The Advisory Committee noted, moreover, that no provision had been made in the programme budget for the biennium 1996-1997 to cover the additional requirements of MICIVIH. It believed that the Secretary-General's statement that it would be possible to absorb the additional cost of $2,841,300 gross within the total revised appropriation of $2,603,280,900 for the biennium 1996-1997 given the fact that the United States dollar had appreciated to a significant extent since December 1996 was premature, since it was impossible to make precise forecasts of currency movements in the last six months of 1997. It therefore believed that the traditional procedure should be followed and that the need for additional appropriations should be considered in the context of the performance report on the budget. Furthermore, any proposal for absorption should be accompanied by an analysis of its impact on overall programme delivery.

4. The Advisory Committee recommended that the Fifth Committee should inform the General Assembly that, should it adopt draft resolution A/51/L.77, the Secretary-General would need to enter into commitments in an amount not to exceed $2,585,100 under section 3 of the programme budget for the biennium 1996-1997. In addition, commitment authority of $256,200 would be necessary under section 32, Staff assessment, to be eventually offset by income in the same amount under section 1, Income from staff assessment. Such additional appropriation as might be necessary would be determined in the context of the consideration of the second performance report of the programme budget for 1996-1997.

5. Ms. GOICOCHEA (Cuba) expressed reservations about the procedures that had been followed for the funding of MICIVIH. The proposal that funding should be provided from existing resources was proof of the selective approach that was being followed to the implementation of General Assembly resolution 41/213. At its fifty-second session, the General Assembly should therefore review the implementation of that resolution.

6. Her delegation also noted with concern the Secretary-General's assumption that it would be possible to absorb the 1997 net additional cost of $2,841,300 gross related to the activities of MICIVIH within the totality of the revised budget appropriation, without any consideration of the impact on programme delivery. It would therefore welcome information on the amount of savings which the Secretariat believed could be achieved by the end of 1997 as a result of currency exchange rate fluctuations, the principal currencies concerned and the anticipated rates of exchange for those currencies. The Secretariat should also inform the General Assembly of when the freeze on recruitment had been lifted, the current vacancy rate in the Organization and the savings that had been achieved by the freeze.

7. In its recommendation to the General Assembly, the Committee should call attention to the fact that the one month's difference between the mandates of MICIVIH and the proposed United Nations Transition Mission in Haiti (UNTMIH) might create a need for additional appropriations to finance the administrative backstopping of MICIVIH.

8. Mr. HALBWACHS (Controller), replying to the questions raised by the delegation of Cuba, said that the Secretary-General was fairly confident that at least $40 million in savings would be realized as a result of the positive movement of currency exchange rates. The value of the United States dollar, for example, had increased by nearly 12 per cent against the Swiss franc. The freeze on recruitment had been lifted the previous April and, at the end of June 1997, the number of existing vacancies had been approximately 1,000. With regard to the backstopping of MICIVIH beyond November 1997, no problems were anticipated in the event of the non-renewal of the mandate of UNTMIH, since it would be necessary to provide a winding-down period for the Mission.

9. Ms. GOICOCHEA (Cuba) expressed surprise that the freeze in recruitment had been lifted only in April 1997, even though the General Assembly's decision on the matter had been taken in December 1996. There was reason to believe that the Secretariat was manipulating the vacancy rate in order to achieve additional savings. At its resumed fifty-first session, the General Assembly should

therefore be informed in writing of the amount of savings that had been achieved as a result of the delay in the implementation of its decision to lift the freeze on recruitment.

10. The CHAIRMAN proposed that, on the basis of the recommendations of the Advisory Committee, the Fifth Committee should decide to recommend to the General Assembly that, should the General Assembly adopt draft resolution A/51/L.77, the Secretary-General would be authorized to enter into commitments in an amount not to exceed $2,585,100 under section 3 of the programme budget for the biennium 1996-1997. The Secretary-General would be further authorized to enter into commitments in an amount of $256,200 under section 32, Staff assessment, to be offset by the same amount under income section 1, Income from staff assessment. Following the procedures adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 41/213, any related requirements for adjustments of the existing 1996-1997 appropriation would be reflected in the context of the second performance report of the programme budget for the biennium 1996-1997 to be submitted to the General Assembly at its fifty-second session.

11. Mr. ATIYANTO (Indonesia) noted that the Chairman of the Advisory Committee had referred to the draft resolution contained in document A/51/L.77, but that the draft text made available by the Secretariat was contained in document A/51/L.77/Rev.1.

12. Mr. MSELLE (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) said that the revised version of the draft resolution had in no way altered the Advisory Committee's recommendations to the Fifth Committee.

13. Ms. GOICOCHEA said that, in introducing the Committee's decision to the plenary Assembly, the Chairman should draw attention to the difference of one month between the expiration of the mandates of MICIVIH and UNTMIH, since it might create a need for additional appropriations to finance administrative support for MICIVIH.

14. Mr. NOUR (Egypt) noted that the Committee's decision was being based on the assumption that the Security Council would approve the establishment of UNTMIH with a mandate until 30 November 1997. Egypt would support the Committee's decision on that basis. Should the Security Council decide not to approve the establishment of UNTMIH, however, the Committee's decision would need to be reviewed.

15. The CHAIRMAN said that if he heard no objection he would take it that the Committee wished to adopt the decision which he had just proposed.

16. It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 10.50 a.m.